

# Neilson admits dressing room disappointment after derby draw

Hearts and Hibs remained unbeaten in a frantic Edinburgh derby. The 0-0 scoreline doesn't do justice to the result.

Both teams created countless opportunities to score but were denied by both men in the sticks and Neilson admitted the spectacle was an enjoyable one, praising both goalkeepers for their clean sheets.

He said: "I thought it was a really good game – I actually enjoyed it. Sometimes as a manager you don't, but there's a tinge of disappointment because we didn't manage to take a couple of really good chances, but again Craig Gordon made a few good saves, so all in all a really entertaining game.

"I think that's one of the reasons both teams are up there joint-second in the league. Craig is an exceptional goalkeeper and Macey put in a great performance.

"It's just run of the mill from Craig, to be honest with you. We see it every day in training. When someone has a shot, I expect him to save it.

"The big thing for me is that we are creating opportunities. I thought after the first five-ten minutes, we took control of the game. We started to play, dominate possession in their half."

Tynecastle was at its raucous best for the occasion and unlike the last meeting at an empty Hampden Park, Neilson believes this game was end-to-end for the full 90 minutes.

“That’s a derby. The game last season at Hampden, it was flat in periods in the game, even though it was a great result. It wasn’t the same today, that was far more enjoyable, the toing and froing and the energy from the crowd. It makes a huge difference.”

Hearts had a number of Edinburgh derby first-timers with Barrie McKay and Ben Woodburn singled out for praise by Neilson.

“To be fair to Ben, he’s not really been with us that much. He came in, played against Dundee United, and then went on international duty. He came back on Thursday, and he’ll continue to get his fitness levels as he only played for 13 minutes with Wales. He’s got real quality.

“Barrie hasn’t played since March and hasn’t trained with a team since the end of May, so again his fitness levels will improve. Again, you can see the quality he has got.”

Craig Gordon was at his brilliant best when denying Kyle Magennis in the second half and after a successful week away with Scotland, Neilson believes he can remain in his current position going forward.

“To be honest, if he stays injury free, I see him staying there for the next couple of years,” he admitted.

“There are a couple of younger ones coming through, but they are not at level Craig is at. He looks after himself and he’s a great character. He’s not got a lot of miles on the clock because he had an injury earlier in his career and I think Craig’s got another two, three, maybe four years in him.”

After being taken off for Northern Ireland, Michael Smith was

a doubt for the fixture, but he did manage 65 minutes and Neilson said he can now rest up ahead of next weekend's match against Ross County.

"He's got a wee niggle in his thigh," Neilson explained.

"We knew we'd get 60, 70 minutes out of him and then we'd take him off. He now just rests up and gets ready for next week."

Hearts have now played Celtic, Aberdeen and Hibernian in their opening five fixtures and Neilson admitted that he's happy with Hearts' start to their Premiership return.

"When you look at when we came up, you never really know where you are going to be. You can talk about, 'we're Hearts, and we are going to do this and that', but until you get into the top-flight with the rest of the teams, the players have to believe.

"I felt, with the players we have put together, we would be at the top end, but they have to believe that as well. And one of the things about today, there's disappointment in the dressing-room, which is a great sign. I've been at clubs before when they get a draw and they come in and it's like they've won the World Cup, whereas here it's disappointment. That shows me that the players believe they should be at the top end."

"That's where we want to be, but we've only played five games, Celtic, Aberdeen and Hibs, three of the top four from last season, and we're undefeated and sitting joint-second, so we now go into Ross County next week, we need to carry that there and hopefully we'll get three points."

Hearts added serious strength in depth in the summer window, so much so, that Jamie Walker and Aaron McEneff didn't make it into the 18-man matchday squad. Neilson admitted that with the group of players he has just now, picking the squad is difficult.

“There were some difficult decisions for me. I’d picked the team a couple of days ago and probably the hardest decision I had was picking the bench. We’ve got a squad of 20 really good players.

“Cammy Logan is the only injury. You can only get 18 in a squad, so it’s a great challenge to have. We spoke to Walker and McEneff, who didn’t make the bench today, but generally they would have come into the squad. That’s the way the club is.”

Barrie McKay, Josh Ginnelly and Taylor Moore were brought off the bench, the latter to replace the struggling Michael Smith, and Neilson described the importance of having impact subs in your ranks.

“That’s the key. It’s having changes in-game that can make you stronger or weaker, defensively or in attack, but it’s also if you pick up two or three injuries having the depth and quality to come in. We’ve got that just now. We’re very lucky with injuries at the moment but it could change within a day, so we have to be ready for it.”